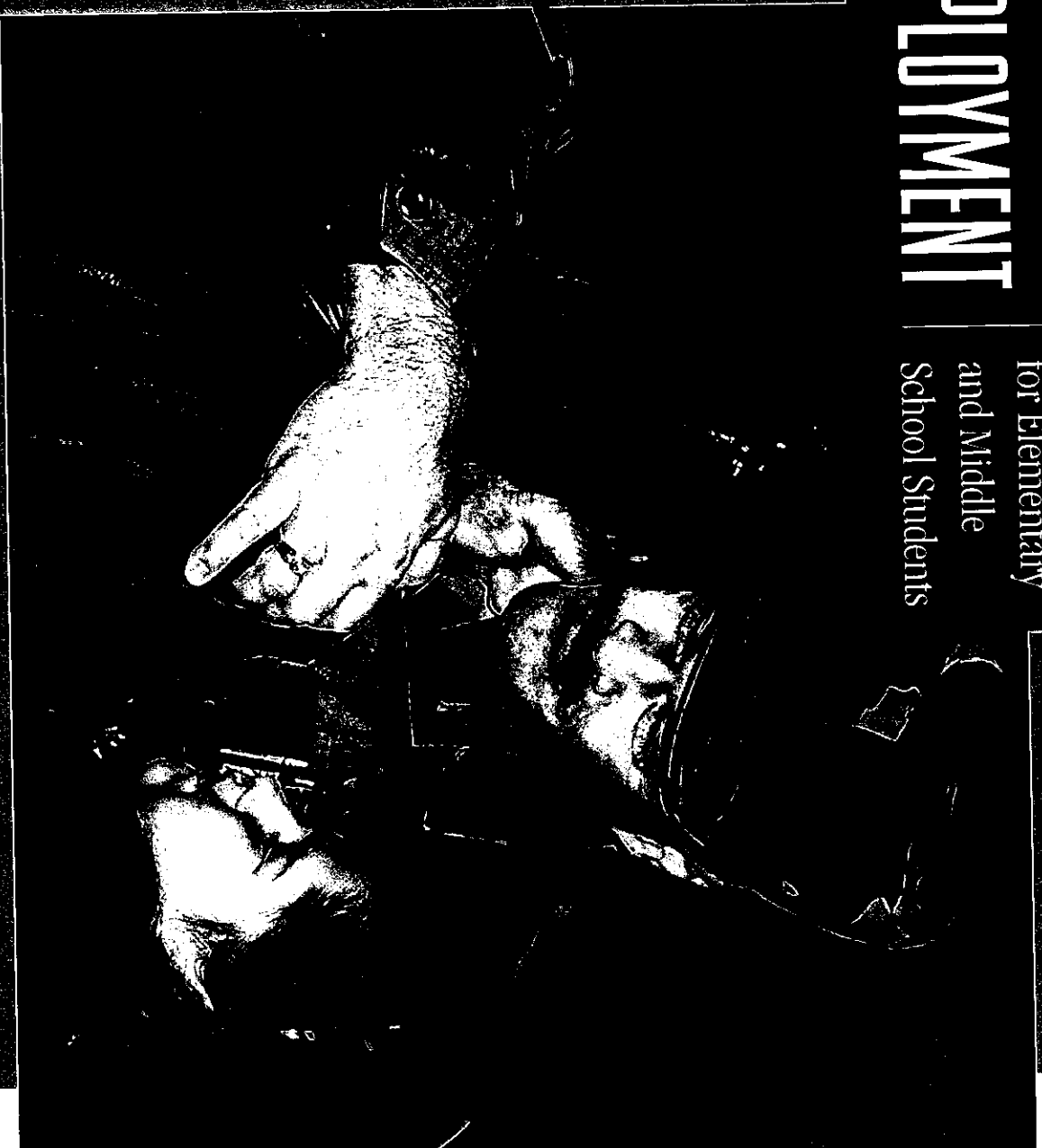


SCHOOL COUNSELOR RESOURCE SERIES
Design Elements and Best Practices from the American School Counselor Association

DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT

A Small-Group
Curriculum
for Elementary
and Middle
School Students



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INTRODUCTION

THE EFFECT OF FAMILY DEPLOYMENT ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Tamara E. Davis, Ed.D., Ed.S.

It is no surprise that children and adolescents who experience the deployment of a family member or significant other face a number of unique challenges and changes that may wreak havoc on their lives. War has become a common reality for many in our world today. With the potential for war abroad to continue indefinitely, school counselors are change agents who are in a critical position to help students face the geographical, emotional and familial changes that occur when a family member goes to war. This curriculum will provide ways to work with students to address these challenges.

Although there are several Web sites and resources for working with children from military families, the empirical research on the efficacy of interventions is lacking. In particular, information regarding effective interventions with adolescents is particularly scarce. For this reason, this curriculum includes a pre- and post-test instrument to document the results of these interventions with children and adolescents. There is a critical need for more research and data related to effective strategies for working with students who have a deployed family member.

The Emotional Impact of Deployment

Much of the research about children and deployment discusses the feelings that result from having a parent deployed. Smith (1998) examined the qualitative effects of peace-keeping deployment on 36 American children whose parents were among the first deployed. These effects included anxiety, troubled war images, volatile feelings toward the government, family abuse and concern about the remaining parent's coping abilities. External impact included difficulty in peer relationships and disruptions to academic achievement (Smith). It is reasonable to assume that these responses may present themselves at school, so school

counselors should have the skills to respond to and help students develop coping mechanisms to deal with these feelings and behaviors.

A student's response to deployment may differ depending on whether the deployed member has been in the military full-time or as a reservist. Sahni (2005) found that when a reservist father is deployed, young males (ages 7-11) in the family take on the role of caretaker and that, as a result, there is cognitive dissonance and a discord in the sense of belonging as the reservist parent rotates between being present and then not present in the family. Full-time military members and families may be more adjusted to military life and the likelihood of deployment since it is their full-time job. However, the reality is that when a family member is deployed for an indefinite period of time it still causes angst for many students.

Support for School Counseling Interventions

Due to war abroad, the number of American military children in our schools has grown, which implies that the need for strategies to work with these students has also increased. "The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, with longer and more dangerous deployments, have made military life even tougher for families left behind. Children's grades suffer. Schools counsel students on anger management...." (Zoroya, 2003, p. 09a). Research supports that more school counselors are needed to help students deal with family member deployment (Hasenauer, 2000). An important aspect of school counseling intervention should address the preparation of students for the deployment of a family member. Often, students may know that a loved one or friend is being deployed and may have several days or weeks to adjust to the idea and to address some of the emotions and changes that will result from the deployment (McDaniel, 1996).

Based on studies and information gleaned in the early 1990s during the Gulf War, several articles and Web sites offer a variety of strategies and interventions to use with students affected by military deployment. For younger children, research indicates that art therapy or drawing, role play and keeping a journal are ways to help children express their thoughts and feelings about their loved ones being deployed (Costello, 1994). The use of a "deployment journal" is also supported by Robertson (2005). With technological advances, research advocates for using videotapes and CDs as a way to keep students connected with the deployed family member (Barack, 2005; Healy, 2004). E-mail capability has also made it easier to stay in communication with a deployed family member (Lamberg, 2004). School counselors may facilitate these activities and have access to resources that support students who wish to acknowledge and make contact with the deployed soldier.

Usefulness of This Curriculum

The curriculum in this book provides a variety of activities school counselors can use in small-group or individual counseling sessions. The advantage of group counseling is that students become aware of others who are having life experiences similar to their own. Mitchum (1991) found that small-group counseling was successful with a group of Navy children whose fathers were deployed. Participation in the group resulted in positive effects on student self-esteem, specifically school-academic self-esteem. Individual counseling might be more appropriate for students who are not as willing or ready to share their emotions in a group. Whether used in small-group or in individual counseling, the curriculum presented is detailed and aligned with the ASCA National Model® so it can be used effectively in a comprehensive school counseling program.

PRE-GROUP PLANNING

Group member selection: Group members will be chosen by self-, teacher-, parent- or administration-referral. Students in the small group will all have a family member or close friend currently in war. Although these students may be at different stages, a well-rounded group curriculum will be provided to ensure students feel supported at school. The school counselor will meet with each student individually before the start of the group to find out each student's background information. This will give the school counselor the ability to understand how to address individual needs within the group.

Group members: This group is designed for six–eight students. The group is appropriate for both males and females.

Meeting: The small group will meet weekly for six–eight weeks in the school counselor's office. Meetings will last approximately 45 minutes, but depending on the depth of the conversations, more time may be needed. It is important to find a private place to meet since students will be sharing personal, and possibly emotional, stories. A variety of activities is provided to allow the school counselor to mold lessons to the group's specific needs.

Parental support: Parental involvement is important for the group's success and goes well beyond simply getting the permission slip signed. Parents will be asked to help their child add items to an honor box that will be made during group for the deployed family member or friend.

School support: If honor boxes are going to be mailed, check if there are school funds available to cover the cost of mailing the boxes out of the country. Make sure to collect shoe boxes and old magazines just in case students do not bring their own materials.

SAMPLE PARENTAL PERMISSION SLIP

Dear Parent/Guardian,

The School Counseling Department organizes several small groups throughout the school year to meet students' needs. We will be starting a small group on Dealing with Deployment. Your child has been recommended for the group to give him or her a chance to connect with other students who have a family member or close friend in the war. We will be discussing the following topics:

- Session 1: Wall of Honor
- Session 2: Patriotism
- Session 3: Where in the World?
- Session 4: Feelings
- Session 5: Anxiety
- Session 6: Talk About It
- Session 7: Resilience
- Session 8: Celebrate

Dealing with Deployment will begin on _____ during resource period. I believe this group will provide students with a time to be able to talk about their family members away at war and will make them aware of the support they have in the school. During this group, we will be making an honor box that we will fill with several items throughout the group to send to your family member or to save to give him/her upon his/her return home. It would be most helpful if you could provide his/her address (if known) below.

Please indicate whether or not you give permission for your child to participate in this small group by signing below and returning to me by _____. If you have questions or concerns about the group, you can reach me by phone (_____) or by e-mail (_____).

Thank you,

Name _____

School Counselor _____

- ☐ **Yes**, I give permission for my child to participate in the Dealing with Deployment small group.
- ☐ **No**, I do not give permission for my child to participate in the Dealing with Deployment small group.

Parent Signature _____

Date _____

Here is the address for our family member/friend in war:

SAMPLE REFERRAL FORM

Dear Teachers and Administrators,

The School Counseling Department is starting a small group for students with a family member or close friend at war. We will be exploring topics such as patriotism, resilience and feelings regarding deployment during the eight weekly sessions. If you know of a student who would benefit from this group, please e-mail me at _____ by _____.

This will be a beneficial small group for those students dealing with a family member's deployment. It will give students an outlet to talk about and express their thoughts about deployment in a caring environment so they will be more mentally available to participate in class.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Name _____
School Counselor _____

SAMPLE NEWSLETTER OR WEB SITE ADVERTISEMENT

Dear Parents,

The School Counseling Department is starting a small group for students who have a family member or close friend at war. We will be exploring topics such as patriotism, resilience and feelings regarding deployment during our eight weekly sessions. The main purpose of this group is to provide students with a safe and caring environment to talk about their thoughts and feelings, as well as to show students they have support at school. Arrangements will be made with the classroom teachers for any work missed in class. If you think your child would benefit from this group, please e-mail me at _____ by _____. I am happy to answer any questions, as well.

Thank you.

Name _____
School Counselor _____

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRE-TEST/POST-TEST

1. Name one positive and one negative feeling you have about your family member being at war.

 2. List two people you can talk to you if you need extra support.

 3. What is a solution if you start to feel anxious about your family member being in war?

 4. On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel right now? (1 = very sad, 10 = very happy)
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|